

# *New Media Markets*

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# NDS prepares to go over the top with VOD

By Chris Wynn

NDS, the News Corporation television-technology company, hopes to launch video-on-demand with some of its European pay-television customers next year using the “open” internet rather than managed IPTV networks.

Such services will be enabled by NDS Fusion, the company’s latest middleware platform that has already received US\$50 million (£28 million) of investment and will get another US\$50 million before it is launched.

Abe Peled, NDS chairman and chief executive, said: “Over-the-top delivery will soon be good enough that you don’t need managed IPTV.”

NDS will use “progressive” downloading to the set-top box. This allows a piece of content to begin playing as soon as enough data has been downloaded, which ensures that the video is not interrupted once it has started. For the user, this offers a similar experience to streaming.

The on-demand content will download to the hard drive set-top box if traf-

fic on the internet is prohibiting an adequate quality of service.

Peled said that “true” IPTV over a managed infrastructure was good for complementary delivery of linear video, but it was still a technology in its infancy.

“IPTV is just not big numbers for mainstream delivery right now,” he said, adding that a special broadband connection would not be required for on-demand services based on NDS Fusion.

“We’re launching next year with existing clients,” said Peled. “The ambition is to launch in the UK and Germany.”

High-end set-top boxes that incorporate Ethernet connections would be able to take a software download to upgrade to Fusion.

Peled added that Fusion was a middleware platform with a potential lifespan of 10 years that would allow operators to combine internet and broadcast content on the set-top box.

Fusion is a “broadband internet-compatible middleware” that can handle web

applications such as Adobe’s Flash to enable a slicker on-screen presentation, according to Peled.

Satellite broadcaster BSkyB, NDS’s major customer in the UK, said that it was looking to launch VOD via set-top boxes with Ethernet connections next year, but would not confirm which type of network it would use. “We’ll be extending the on-demand capacity that we have with Sky Anytime to an Ethernet connection to the TV,” said BSkyB.

Markus Schmid, chief executive of cable operators TeleColumbus and Primacom, NDS’s German customers, said: “We’re contemplating Fusion for our middleware next year. We need hybrid [using] DOCSIS cable or through the back channel with DSL.”

Schmid said at the IBC trade show last week that he wanted TeleColumbus to be the first German cable operator in the country to be providing only interactive digital-television set-top boxes.